

July 2017

To Those Aligned With PSALT:

Have you ever wanted to give a standing ovation to a sermon? For the first time in my life, I really wanted to do exactly that when the Rev. Douglas Rollwage, the outgoing Moderator of the General Assembly (GA), provided an incredible address to the crowded sanctuary at St. Andrew's Kingston at the opening sederunt entitled "The People's Book." I was so moved by that sermon that I acquired the transcript and distributed it to everyone within my congregation. You can access it on our [website](#).

Now that the 143rd GA is over, what sense can we make of it? What impact will decisions made have upon the denomination? What is before us as PSALT? Some of these issues will become clearer in time, but here are some reflections on our situation.

First, the penultimate decision of GA this year was to defer the recommendations coming from the Justice Ministry (JM) department of the Life and Mission Agency (LMA), Sexuality Recommendations 11-15. Recommendation 11 would allow clergy to bless same sex marriages conducted by civil authorities. Recommendation 12 would affirm freedom of conscience for clergy who would not want to participate in same sex marriages conducted by civil authorities. Recommendation 13 would have LMA prepare orders of worship blessing same sex marriages conducted by civil authorities. Recommendation 14 would not bar anyone from candidacy or ordination by reason of same sex civil marriage. Recommendation 15 would refer the previous recommendations to sessions and others to report back by January 31, 2018, with the understanding that Christian marriage is a union in Christ in which two individuals regardless of gender become one in the sight of God.

The motion to defer these recommendations carried by about a 60% majority, which displayed the deep divisions in the PCC around these issues. Out of the 233 commissioners, 55 registered their dissent, and of those, about 15 submitted written reasons, which you can read in the Acts and Proceedings.

The motion to defer these recommendations to a future GA was made to defer their consideration until after the work of the Committee on Church Doctrine (CCD) was completed on these matters. In other words, this GA decided that practice follows doctrine. Doctrine, which comes from appropriate biblical hermeneutics, informs our behaviour. According to its report to GA, the CCD has a great deal of work lined up ahead of it, but there are forces within it wanting to push forward changes to doctrine. Also, a commissioner could bring such motions to the floor of a future GA, and it is debatable whether the moderator at that time would consider them to be in order. PSALT is not out of the woods! Your prayers around these deep divisions in our church are coveted.

The impact of the decision to defer Recommendations 11-15 may leave some PSALTY people dissatisfied because some want this matter settled – the quicker the better. Others, including our ethnic congregations and Presbyteries, need time to translate, study, consider, and discuss materials in order to speak into issues fluently. The majority of those of us who would consider ourselves orthodox and conservatively aligned are of a mind that the motion to defer was to the great benefit of our cause.

Second, another big success for PSALT was around the issue of gracious dismissal. To paraphrase the Clerks of Assembly in 2016, their response then was there wasn't enough of a mandate to consider gracious dismissal. At the time, there were four overtures on gracious dismissal under consideration. Over three years there have been 21 sessions and four presbyteries raising issues on gracious dismissal or

unity, as well as two petitions from the Han Ca Presbyteries and one other related petition. The response of the clerks in 2017, again to paraphrase, was basically that we answered that issue last year. At GA, a Special Committee was instructed to report back at a specific sederunt on the issue. It did its work and identified the five major themes raised in the overtures and petitions. Its five recommendations will require the Clerks and others to which this issue was referred to treat these matters seriously. We look forward to that work and the report which will come to GA in 2018. This may lead to looking at creative alternatives to gracious dismissal, like creating theologically aligned Presbyteries, or creating two new denominations each according to their theological traditions, while holding some things in common.

Third, there is a great deal of work ahead of us. There were no less than six (!) major documents sent to congregations, presbyteries, and other bodies of the PCC for study and report by January 31, 2018. PSALT is already in the process of preparing critiques of each of these papers which may help congregations, presbyteries, and others in their consideration of and reporting on the various papers. The matters being referred for study and report are 1) Intersex and Transgender issues; 2) Biblical Reflections on which JM recommendations were based; 3) Historic Argument Concerning Human Sexuality; 4) What the Bible Teaches on Covenanted Monogamous Same-Sex Relationships; 5) Where from Here? (three options); and 6) Physician Assisted Suicide. We hope to have critiques ready on our website no later than September of this year and would encourage your own personal reflection on these various papers, submitting your thoughts. Possibly, they would serve as some thoughtful summer reading.

The PSALT Leadership Team recognizes that there is a lot of work before us. We recognize the need for resourcing PSALTY folks to be able to speak into issues fluently. We also recognize the need to develop effective strategies and to empower commissioners to General Assembly in 2018. We are also building alliances and exploring the possibility of hosting a Pastor's Conference sometime in the next year. No matter how much effort we put into the PSALT movement though, we ultimately recognize our complete and utter dependency on the Holy Spirit giving us the grace and wisdom to be able to move forward according to His perfect will.

In two short years, the PSALT movement has grown and has had considerable impact, but we need your help. Without the *Presbyterian Record* or any other way to access the pews in the PCC, we need your help in developing the PSALT movement. We are building a database of people who are aligned with PSALT's mission and would love to add to it people that you know who share our vision. Please consider passing this note on to at least five people that you know, asking that they be added to our list by contacting us at contactpsalt@gmail.com or by sending a note to PSALT c/o P.O. Box 15065 Aspen Woods P.O., Calgary Alberta, T3H 0N8.

Thank you for your prayers for the mission of Christ in the Holy Apostolic Church and within the PCC. Thank you as well for your prayers for PSALT's work which "aims at building the Presbyterian Church into a thoroughly biblical and Reformed expression of Christian discipleship and witness." We pray that the ministries of PSALT will enhance your ministries and the mission of the Kingdom.

In Christ,
Rev. Dr. Martin Kreplin,
Chair, PSALT Leadership Team